

EXHIBITION TEXT

MIRIAM CAHN

STILL LEBEN

14 March - 25 April 2026

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

With *STILL LEBEN*, Miriam Cahn embarks on a new body of work. In these recent pieces—almost all produced in the past few months—there are hardly any bodies anymore. Only objects, everyday situations, interiors. No more brutality, at least on the surface. Instead, a focus on the domestic world and on what the artist calls *le ménage*.

The pieces are small to medium in scale. Miriam Cahn plays less with effects of scale than she has in the past. There are no violent contrasts, no oversized works that absorb and confront the architecture. Rather, these are works that the body can make, that the body can carry. The things painted and drawn, like the images themselves, all have to do with the body. A body that is almost invisible. A softer, more measured spatiality. *Still Leben*. A quiet life.

Stilleben also means still life in German. In Miriam Cahn's works we see objects, everyday life, silence. Yet these still lifes are of a particular kind. Or rather, they do not conform to the genre and its codes. They seem barely composed, the framing is often close, direct, sometimes frontal. These things are those the artist has within reach: tools, furniture, clothing. No symbol, no metaphor—just the everyday. The everyday of a woman.

Some signs carry no specific gender connotation—a glass, a ladder, a refrigerator. Yet here and there a few clues, very few: a handbag, a sanitary pad, gloves. Once brought into relation with one another, they form a gesture of absolute clarity. It is a matter of showing, without *détour*, the density of a world: gestures, practices, what concerns women's bodies—that is, half of the population, the half responsible for taking care of these objects and of the household for the other half.

Miriam Cahn's *stilleben* are anything but motionless. The silence within the works is alive. Movement is latent. For the *ménage* the artist speaks about—the subject of these works—refers to the action of things, to the way the organization of the interior opens outward through objects and spaces. Animated bodies, inanimate things. Another way of seeing life in common.

In these works, the woman's body is not confined within the home. It is active there, the tasks of cleaning reveal a body responsible for itself. Hands appear—acting parts of the body—hands that wash, that organize, that arrange. To speak of *ménage*, in a sense, is to speak of the necessity of order and disorder, of life, of taking care. In one of the works we see a jacket laid down, open. In another, a wardrobe in which clothes are neatly aligned.

In *TRAUMBEFEHL*, Miriam Cahn's exhibition at Galerie Meyer Riegger in Berlin in November 2025, objects seemed to rebel. The artist described how a knife could suddenly fall, the hand no longer able to hold it as firmly as before. Putting on shoes, tying laces, was sometimes no longer as easy as before for a body that is aging. Miriam Cahn also said in an interview: "old age is my future."

In *STILL LEBEN*, everything exists on the same level, there is no hierarchy. Yet each object appears roughly only once. The image is unique, and so is the thing represented. The artist speaks in this regard of *Einmaligkeit*: the uniqueness of the things that surround us, that we care about, that make up our interior world. If the thing disappears, it will be lost forever.

For *STILL LEBEN* is not a series. Each thing, each scene is adjusted, at the scale of the frame, so that it appears to the gaze at a similar dimension. Everything is placed on the same plane. The result is the opposite of flattening: what emerges are differences and relief.

The subjects, of different kinds, are also treated through varied means: painting on canvas, on wood, pencil, charcoal, pastel on paper. And yet everything is brought back to the vision of an equal—perhaps even egalitarian—composition. Like the line of a poem. Like a constellation.

When I telephoned Miriam Cahn to speak about her upcoming exhibition, she told me: "what is shown is in the image." I understood: there is nothing to see other than what is represented. But I also understood that each painting, each drawing shows what the artist wished to make visible: material life, the life of women, the body as it matures. But also this: the violence and wars that haunted earlier works have been set aside. The emotions linked to them reside in that space—in the realm of a reality the artist has decided not to paint.

I cannot think about these works without imagining what remains in that night, behind the visible. Those bodies that irradiate in Miriam Cahn's works, and in which I now see the life of these objects.

In most of the images, bodies are missing. The clothes seem emptied out. The interiors are uninhabited. Objects sometimes appear abandoned, isolated. Yet the body is omnipresent. It is as if things spoke—without words, in a physical way. Spoke to bodies.

During our conversation, Miriam Cahn told me she was haunted by the images of families who had to leave their homes, their neighborhoods, fleeing wars, destruction, catastrophes. They set out along the road carrying their ménage with them—these objects that, in exile, connect them to their history.

STILL LEBEN introduces a major shift in Miriam Cahn's practice. Yet I do not see this as a desire to avert the gaze. On the contrary, I believe it is a way of turning the glove inside out, using the means of painting to show the outside through the inside.

It is also a way of deepening her gaze, of rethinking the scale of her action: concentrating, becoming more precise, acting with what is literally within reach.

In one of the works we see a hand holding an iPhone. There is no image on the screen. Miriam Cahn's aim is not to foreground a particular situation, event, or moment in history. It is the painting of a device—a thing that allows us to communicate, but also and above all to make images. But which images? Those we receive, or those we emit? What images should we emit today? How should we transmit them?

STILL LEBEN is surely a way of posing these questions. An invitation to see differently—through this black screen facing us. To linger over what can be touched. Over what touches us

Text by Yann Châteigné Tytelman

Yann Châteigné Tytelman is a writer and curator. His recent writings address silence and the politics of darkness. He has organized artistic projects around questions of ecology (How to be Organic?, Country SALTS, Bennwil, 2022; Regenerative Futures, Fondation Thalie, Brussels, 2024), alternative histories (Material Thinking: Gordon Matta-Clark, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, 2019; By repetition, you start noticing details in the landscape, 2019; it Never Ends, KANAL-Centre Pompidou, Brussels, 2020-21), and destruction (A Glittering Ruin Sucked Upwards, HISK, Brussels, 2022; Four Sisters, Jewish Museum of Belgium, Brussels, 2023). His texts have appeared in Conceptual Fine Arts, Mousse, Spike, and frieze. He is a member of the faculty of the Curatorial Studies program at KASK (Ghent). He lectures at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and is a PhD supervisor at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. In 2023, the Centre d'édition contemporaine in Geneva published Blackout, whose English translation was released in London by Les Fugitives in 2025. He lives and works in Brussels, where he co-founded Celador, an art space dedicated to "doing things with words."

BIOGRAPHIE

Miriam Cahn (born in Basel in 1949) lives and works in Stampa, Switzerland.

Selected solo exhibitions include: *What Looks at Us*, MAAT - Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon (2025); *READING DUST*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2024); *Ma pensée sérielle*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023); *GEZEICHNET*, ICA Milano (2022); *MEINEJUDEN*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen (2022); *ME AS HAPPENING*, Kunsthall Charlottenborg (2020) and The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery (2021); *Fremd das fremde*, Palazzo Castelmur, Stampa (2021); Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing (2020); *I AS HUMAN*, Kunstmuseum Bern (2019), Haus der Kunst (2019) and Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2019); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2019); and Kunsthaus Bregenz (2019).

She participated in the 59th Venice Biennale (2022), the Baltic Triennial in Vilnius and Riga (2018), the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018), and documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens (2017). She has received numerous prestigious awards, including the 14th Rubens Prize of the City of Siegen (2022), the Oberrheinischer Kunstpreis Offenburg, the Basler Kunstpreis, the Käthe Kollwitz Prize, the Ströher Prize, and a grant from the DAAD in 1985. Her works are held in renowned collections including the Pinault Collection (Paris), Kunstmuseum Basel, Tate Modern, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Museum of Modern Art (New York), Rubell Museum, Long Museum (Shanghai), and National Museum of Art Osaka.